

OUR VIEW

Child care recovery solutions

Rural Oregon is facing a difficult post-COVID economic recovery. The \$1.9 trillion federal coronavirus relief package will undoubtedly help, but without addressing some long-standing barriers to economic development, we will not grow and thrive.

The lack of child care is one of those barriers. We live in a child care desert, where the number of available slots is a fraction of the need.

Without adequate and affordable child care options for children younger than age 5, a laundry list of problems arises:

- Parents (women, mostly) who want to work or attend school may need to drop out of the workforce or college, harming their family's long-term economic future.

- Employers trying to recruit and retain employees have limited options, as potential workers are not available.

- A "brain drain" ensues, as professionals leave rural Oregon to pursue their careers in areas with more child care options.

- Rural school districts suffer from diminishing student enrollment year after year, as young families move away.

- When there are few preschool options, many 5 year olds are not ready to learn when they start kindergarten, which undermines their chances of future academic success.

A strong child care system is needed to solve these problems.

The Ford Family Foundation's recent report, "Child Care in Rural Oregon," charts a path to improve the quantity and quality of child care. Their five recommendations should be quickly enacted.

Their first recommendation is for the Oregon Department of Human Services to use data from surveys of child care providers across the state to accurately model the actual costs of providing child care, to calculate reimbursement rates that are fair across the state and don't put rural areas at a disadvantage.

Second, do away with the state's current system of paying more for child care in urban areas than is paid in rural areas, and permanently waive or significantly lower the co-payments for low-income families who receive child care assistance.

Third, recognize that both home-based child care providers and child care centers need consistent and reliable funding. They need to receive payments based on a child's enrollment rather than their daily attendance.

Fourth, launch a statewide system to link child care provider networks so that administrative services, such as bookkeeping and payroll, can be shared by home-based child care and child care centers across the state, lowering costs for all.

Fifth, make changes in Oregon's child care regulations to allow small child care centers to be located in nonresidential settings, so they can be licensed as "Certified Family Child Care." This would allow for mixed-age groups of up to 16 children in "micro-centers" located in schools and other existing buildings.

These steps don't solve the underlying problem causing the shortage of child care: This care is expensive to provide because of the high caregiver-to-child ratios needed for the safety of very young children, and is not subsidized by the government except for very low-income families. The brunt of the cost of child care is primarily borne by families. For many families, child care costs more than their mortgage, and can be as high as college tuition.

Ultimately, we as a nation need to face the fact that a child's education does not start in kindergarten. It starts at birth, so the more tax dollars we spend on high-quality child care and education, the less we will spend on remedial services and social welfare systems, and the better off we will be in the long run.



One week of winter



LARRY
NIERENBERG
EYE TO THE SKY

After a relatively warm and dry December and January with very little lowland snow, many of us were wondering if we would make it through the entire winter without having to use our trusty snow shovels.

Well, February started out similarly to the rest of winter but around mid-month things changed — and rather quickly. So, what happened?

First of all, snow in February is certainly very common, (just think back to 2019) but so much in a short period of time can be overwhelming. The February snowfall in Pendleton of just under 20 inches (19.6) made the month the second snowiest February on record, and all of that snow fell in five days.

Similar amounts occurred across other portions of Northeast Oregon as well. The record still remains February 2019, when more than 32 inches of snow fell. The area also had four straight days of 4 inches or more of snow. The previous record is two days.

One factor that came into play was the polar vortex. This term has been discussed across the media for weeks, but what exactly is the polar vortex and what does it do?

The polar vortex is a large area of low

pressure and cold air that surrounds both of the earth's poles. It is always present, whether summer or winter. In the winter it often gets stronger, but its strength will vary and it sends colder air southward into Canada and the United States. How strong the vortex gets will determine how far south the cold air gets.

This year, it was particularly strong and sent very cold air into the northern plains. Portions of Montana and the Dakotas had low temperatures of minus 20 to minus 30, and even lower. The cold air modified as it moved south, but in spite of this, record cold was felt all the way down into Texas.

Along with the cold came snow, with snow being recorded in Houston. Multiple snowstorms were recorded in Dallas/Fort Worth. I lived in Dallas/Fort Worth for a few years, and while occasional snow is possible, multiple snowstorms back-to-back are extremely rare. The duration of subfreezing temperatures even led to widespread power outages and frozen water pipes that many areas are still cleaning up from.

You may be asking how does the polar vortex affect the Pacific Northwest? Generally, when cold outbreaks move into the midsection of the country, they then move east and south and impact the central and southern plains, and eventually the East Coast. The Rocky Mountains protect the West Coast from the severe cold, as happened this year.

However, sometimes cold air does manage to make it west of the mountains and down through the Columbia Basin to east of the Cascades. In mid-February we

ended up with the coldest temperatures of the winter season, where temperatures did not climb above freezing for several days. Nevertheless, these temperatures were not particularly cold for winter in the Inland Northwest, where temperatures can be in the teens and 20s or even colder, especially following a heavy snow event. Needless to say, we did end up with a modified version of the polar vortex.

When temperatures are cold, there is always a chance that if moisture comes at the right time there will be snow, and sure enough the Columbia Basin, Blue Mountain foothills and much of the Inland Northwest had three storms in quick succession that dropped at least 12 inches of total snow in many areas. None of the storms were particularly strong, but the air was plenty cold and there was enough moisture for a rather prolonged period of snow. Amounts in the lower elevations ranged from around 10 to 20 inches, with some of the nearby mountain locations measuring the snow in feet rather than inches.

So, if you are someone who likes winter and snow, you had your winter this year, just in a short period of time. On the other hand, if you don't like winter and thought perhaps you were going to sneak by into March with no snow, you just had to grin and bear it for one week.

Larry Nierenberg is a senior forecaster for the National Weather Service in Pendleton. Nierenberg leads National Weather Service community outreach and hazardous weather preparedness and resiliency programs.

YOUR VIEWS

BMCC has many issues to solve to remain solvent

The column by Kim Puzey (To save community college, consider a K-14 structure/Saturday, March 13) about how soon BMCC won't be able to pay its bills is inevitable.

BMCC should have few locations, but invest in affordable housing for students. There should be many full-time teachers, small secretarial pools with a strong college work study program supporting the college, and administrators who understand physical fitness is tied to learning.

While wasteful spending for buildings happened, the upkeep of essential physical fitness facilities were demolished. Think about it. BMCC had a deep diving pool, Olympic-sized swimming pool and classy tennis courts, which promoted physical fitness. Harvard on the Hill was a compliment.

When programs address local opportunities, BMCC will survive and thrive. Immediately, buildings built that are a loss should be sold. An example would be Milton-Freewater.

The BMCC leadership that built buildings was wasteful. The remodeling of those buildings was even more wasteful. Safe housing has been needed for student populations to grow.

Mr. Puzey pointed out the concept of "if we build it they will come." The problem with that thinking was they could come, but there was no place to stay. Housing for students is needed today. And despite this ignorance to address drug issues related to adult students, there will need to be student housing for felons.

Umatilla County has been proclaimed as a known high-intensity drug trafficking area in America since 2006. Our law enforcement has been in a position to step it up and rise to this horrific drug abuse situation. Has BMCC? Is there a drug counseling program yet?

When I graduated as a teacher, EOU prepared me as a fully licensed educator. Why is it that the agriculture graduates are not licensed, or even have CDLS? It is imperative that BMCC support local agricultural communities by instructing students that there are strict requirements for agricultural jobs. For instance, a sign outside the agricultural classroom might also read: You must pass a drug test to gain a job in agriculture, have specific license requirements for the state in which you will be employed, and submit your entire career to random drug tests.

Ron Daniels utilized student work study programs to support the college. If you needed a job, you got one.

The mispending of money will upend BMCC if actions looking from Walter McRae's and Ron Daniels' perspectives are not taken.

Sally Walden Sundin
Walla Walla, Washington

Votes reveal GOP remains Trump's party

I hope that all voters remember when they get their American Rescue check that not a single Republican voted to help you.

Polls showed that Americans were in favor of this bill. The Republicans continue to be afraid of former President Donald Trump even after he lost the election, the

second time that he lost the popular vote, and is hiding out in Florida.

Trump has appeared only once, giving a speech in Florida in which he put down some Republicans that are in his party. He doesn't care about anyone but himself. He doesn't even care that some of his voters are financially struggling because he ended his speech asking for his followers to send money directly to Donald J. Trump, not to the Republican Party but to him personally, because he's going to need a legal defense fund.

Hopefully, they are not that gullible because he made \$1.9 billion while he was in office (according to Forbes magazine), much of it taxpayer money at his resorts, so let him use his own money to fight his legal battle.

Asking for donations to his personal account only shows that he isn't in support of the Republican Party now, but once again he's only for himself, the party of Trump.

If the Republicans ever want to restore their party to what it was "Before Trump Decided to be a Republican" — a working, two-party system — they have to stand up to him and expunge him from the party.

President Joe Biden is busy keeping his eyes on the road to make America better and on the path of helping the American people, all people regardless of party. Biden is on his way to restoring our country to greatness with an approval rating of 62%, something Trump never accomplished. Glad we now have a real president, a qualified president with years of public service experience and a president with empathy.

Sue Ooten
Madras